

Testimony Submitted to the Human Services Committee

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To Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Kimberly Dole and I am writing today as Director of an Early Care and Education State Funded Child Development Center in Groton. I am testifying today to urge the legislature to increase reimbursement rates for teachers in publicly funded programs. Two main issues intersect: increase in program standards and increase in qualifications for teachers with no substantive increase in reimbursements rates to adequately compensate teachers. We need your assistance to come up with reasonable solutions in order to maintain our small businesses and continue to serve working parents.

I have been in this field for well over twenty years and in my current program for the last nine. It saddens me that in a field with a workforce mostly consisting of women that wages are stagnate. I can tell you that my program has not been able to give increases for any reason due to the increase in regulations, teacher academic requirements and day to day costs of running a program in Connecticut.

I have had many teachers leave our program, not because they don't like our mission or what they do for the children and families they care for, but simply because it is too difficult to earn a living wage doing what they love. Instead they go into other professions that have more advancement with better pay. Those that choose to stay in the field often hold a minimum of one extra job to help cover day to day costs.

In my center I have 26 staff, all female except one. Of those staff, only 4 do not receive any outside assistance from state programs only because they have a significant other that is able to help with those expenses. I have several staff that receive food stamps, housing assistance, heat assistance and care 4 kids.

In a recent study, it showed that in the state of Connecticut, for someone to be able to have somewhere to live along with those expenses, pay for children expenses and all other day to day expenses they need to be making a minimum of \$20 hour. Our field does not even come close to that number and our teachers need to have college degrees in order to work in classrooms. Please note that in that quick break down above there is nothing about the repayment of college loans. If teachers could receive a livable and respectful wage for what they do, they would no longer need state assistance. Therefore, saving the state thousands of dollars. Far less then what it would cost to give them the living wage they need to survive.

Let's put this in some perspective:

In Groton, the starting salary for a beginner teacher, not one that has years of experience as many of my staff do, is \$46,000 a year plus benefits. They receive summers off, paid trainings during the day, planning time (when their children are with other teachers) out of the classroom and generally work a 6.5 hour day. When there are children with difficulties and specific needs, these teachers are able to call upon resources within their system to help develop plans that benefit the child and the classroom as a whole.

Our teachers make on a high end, \$29,120 a year plus benefits (which are not even close to public school). Our teacher's work all year, 8 hour days, generally plan when children are resting in the classroom, must attend staff meetings generally held in the evening to extend their day and often find trainings outside the program on their own. We give trainings during staff meetings and send one or two people out to other trainings when availability and funding allows so that they can bring back to the group the materials and information. Having whole group all day trainings with our own teachers and those in the community is unheard of and difficult without cutting services to the families that need us.

When our children have difficulties and specific needs, we need to contract for services or wait for services to come from other agencies. We lose precious time waiting for assistance and often try to research the best way to handle situations until we receive those outside services. As with public school teachers, our teachers do observations; do individual plans for children along with group activities. Everything our teachers do with children is done with purpose and intent from infancy all the way through to the after school program. Lastly, our teachers develop positive working relationships with families that assist in strengthening the educational growth of the children we serve.

It is known that those children that have a quality Early Care and Education experience do better in public school. However, we pay those teachers far less but require similar educational requirements and far more time put into our children in a year. What helps to make a program quality is the longevity of quality teaching staff. Children need consistency and when teachers come in and out of classrooms it adds to the stress of the child and family and therefore lessens the ability of a child to learn. As the director of a State Funded Program, I want the best quality for my children, families and staff so that we can all benefit from receiving and giving a quality Early Care and Education experience.

Please help show the Early Care and Education teachers throughout the state of Connecticut that you value the work they do to assist in closing the achievement gap. All teachers no matter if they are teaching infants or they are teaching seniors in high school deserve to be recognized for the hard work and dedication they put into his/her profession and the difference they are making in closing the achievement gap.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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